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Scope of Survey

1. The primary purpose of this brief survey of the Agency's fitness report system has been to determine if the objectives of the fitness report are better served (a) by the requirement that the reports be shown to the individual at the time of their preparation by the supervisor, or (b) by some procedure not requiring showing the actual report at the time of preparation. To this end, consultations have been held with officials in various components of the Agency, chiefly the Office of Personnel, and comparisons have been made with fitness report procedures in other representative Governmental agencies. No effort has been made to appraise the contents of the fitness report as to substantive merits, this aspect being considered to be beyond the scope of the survey.

Purpose of Fitness Report

2. Broadly speaking, the fitness report is designed to serve two general purposes:

a. To serve as a management tool; namely to bring supervisor and employee together so that the employee will know what his duties are, how he can better carry out his responsibilities, etc. The net effect of this process is hopefully the increased effectiveness of the employee and with it the increased effectiveness of the office management as a whole.

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b. To provide an objective evaluation of employee performance and capability which can serve as the basis for future personnel actions such as promotion, overseas assignment, honor award, separation, etc.

3. In practice, these two broad purposes are not always compatible. The principal obstacle standing in the way of compatibility is the natural reluctance on the part of supervisors to be fully objective in assessing an employee's performance when faced with the requirement to discuss this assessment personally with the individual concerned. There are doubtless supervisors who are not afraid to call a spade a spade. On the other hand, human nature being what it is, the general practice appears to be for supervisors to gloss over or even to ignore employee weaknesses in writing fitness reports rather than to face the unpleasant task of surfacing these weaknesses to the employee himself. There may even be some cases, particularly at overseas posts, where supervisor-employee relations could be seriously impaired by the showing of a poor fitness report to the employee at the time of preparation. At the same time, while the requirement to show a fitness report to an employee may dilute the report's objectivity, it does tend to prevent excesses, possibly including untruths, on the part of the reporting supervisor who might otherwise be tempted to go to extremes in describing employee weaknesses, especially when personality clashes may be involved.

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History within Agency

4. The history of the fitness report within the Agency since its establishment in 1947 bears ample testimony to the lack of any consistent policy with regard to the procedures to be followed. From 1947 to 1952 the Agency used the standard Civil Service fitness report for Headquarters personnel and the Agency's "Status and Efficiency Report" for field personnel. (Both these forms left it to the discretion of the supervisor as to whether they should be shown to the individual, although it was and is the general practice in the Civil Service to show.) From August 1952 until May 1954, Headquarters adopted a "Personnel Evaluation Report" which required that the supervisor discuss the evaluation with the individual. There was also a provision for additional comments which presumably were not discussed with the employee. From May 1954 until January 1956, the Agency adopted for all personnel a standard "Fitness Report" which stipulated that discussing with the individual was mandatory but showing was optional.* In January 1956 the Agency instituted a

*The following certification by the supervisor was required: "I certify that, during the latter half of the period covered by this report, I have discussed with the rated individual the manner in which he has performed his job and provided suggestions and criticisms wherever needed. I believe that his understanding of my evaluation of his performance is consistent with my evaluation of him as evidenced by this fitness report and I have informed him of his strengths, weaknesses, and on-the-job effectiveness. If performance during the report period has been unsatisfactory, there is attached a copy of the memorandum notifying him of unsatisfactory performance."

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two-part fitness report: Part one assessed "performance" and was to be shown to the individual, while part two assessed "potential" and was not to be shown to the individual. In January 1959 the two-part fitness report was replaced by a simplified one part format. This action was taken as the result of a recommendation by a task force set up to study the question by the Career Council. The following is excerpted from the minutes of the Career Council meeting:

"The Task Force decided that a more simplified form was necessary and that the two part form was not successful. Showing Part I to the employee and not showing Part II was a source of constant trouble - many supervisors opposed this policy and did show Part II to the employee rated. It was the consensus of numerous operating and administrative officials that the information recorded in Part II (Potential) never really served to identify employees who are intellectually outstanding or those individuals who have leadership, force, and high potential for growth."

The 1959 format, as well as a revision of it which was instituted in 1962 and is still in effect, carried the requirement that it be shown to the employee or that an explanation be given for failure to do so.

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Practice in Other Departments

5. The Department of State and the military services follow somewhat different procedures from the Agency in the handling of fitness reports. Within the past few months, actually in May, State revised its policy to the end that the rating or reviewing officials are no longer required to show efficiency ratings to Foreign Service Officers. The officers may, however, see their ratings upon request to the office of personnel in Washington. State was prompted to adopt this measure because, "the requirement that ratings be discussed at the time of preparation gave rise to an understandably human reluctance to be as candid and frank about performance shortcomings as the effective operation of the Foreign Service required."

6. Within the military services, the Army, Air Force and Marine Corps especially prohibit the discussion of the fitness report with the rated officer, except in the case of a substandard or derogatory report, while the Navy makes discussion permissible although it is my impression that the general practice of not showing is followed. All services make fitness reports available to the individual on request at headquarters in Washington. Both the Army and Air Force have the procedure of "performance counseling" whereby the rating officer some months before writing the fitness report is required to discuss an officer's performance along the lines, "if I were rating you today this is what I would say."

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7. It should be pointed out that the military services, due to their much larger sizes, rely to a far greater extent upon the written record for effecting personnel actions than does the Agency. Selection panels for promotion in the military services seldom have any personal acquaintance with the candidates and in most cases have no basis for judgment other than the records contained in the personnel folders. In view of the intense competition, particularly in the higher ranks, anything less than a superior rating virtually eliminates an officer from consideration. As a result, it is freely conceded that fitness reports in the military services are greatly inflated. The fact that the fitness reports are not shown to the rated officer may tend to diminish this inflation but it by no means eliminates it. Nevertheless, it is the need for objectivity which has led the military services and the Department of State to follow the practice of not showing fitness reports to rated officers.

8. While I have made no effort to examine the Agency's personnel practices, it is my belief, based upon brief discussions with the Office of Personnel and upon my own experience, that, contrary to the military services, the written record plays a role secondary to personal appraisal in such actions, particularly at higher grade levels. Thus, while there is no intention to condone lack of objectivity in fitness reports, it is something that our

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personnel system can probably tolerate, since the career service boards can and do supplement the written record with a personal knowledge of the individual's performance and capability. This procedure appears to have worked satisfactorily except when the personnel record is to serve as a justification for separation or other adverse personnel action. Memories of the 701 program are all too vivid in this respect.

Conclusion

9. It is clear, particularly from the records of the Career Council, that the question of show or not show with regard to fitness reports has been the subject of exhaustive debate over the years. Convincing arguments can be presented in support of each procedure. Agency policy appears to have varied in accordance with official opinion at any given time as to which of the goals described in Paragraph 2, was the more important, with the inevitable result that "what you gain on the apples you lose on the bananas." In my opinion, the evidence presently available tends to prove rather conclusively that the requirement to show fitness reports to subordinates detracts from their objectivity. However, an increase in objectivity, while obviously desirable, would probably be of significant use only in those cases where adverse personnel action, chiefly separation, is contemplated. Barring another 701 exercise, it would

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seem to me that greater benefits accrue to the Agency in using the fitness report as a management tool (see Paragraph 2.a.) and thus in showing and discussing it with the individual. In any event, if past history is a valid criterion, the life expectancy of any fitness report adopted by the Agency is about two to three years so that the system carries the seeds of change within itself.

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Remarks:

Thanks very much.

Attached is the informal "report" [Redacted] did for Mr. Earman on fitness reports.

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This is FYI. Mr. Earman has the original, and obtained some informal comments on it from others. NO distribution has been made of this report.

JSE thought you should see it if you had not previously, in view of your interest in F.R.'s. (JSE saw Mr. [Redacted] memo, and [Redacted] comments)

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FROM: NAME, ADDRESS AND PHONE NO.		DATE
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Shanahan

MEMORANDUM FOR: Mr. Earman

In checking with [redacted] to see what "IG reports on fitness reports" [redacted] was wishing to see, [redacted] mentioned never having seen the report [redacted] drafted.... we do have some carbon copies.....would you like him to see it? *WPAK*

(It turned out, [redacted] was actually referring to the attached report written by [redacted] f the A&E staff for [redacted] - see DPPUS 17 Apr 64 memo & all.)

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